

USPS Update:

Shirley Temple Stamp Debut April 18

by John F. Dunn

On April 18 the USPS will issue its Shirley Temple stamp, the 20th in the Legends of Hollywood series. The stamp art is a painting by artist Tim O'Brien, based on a 1935 image from the movie *Curly Top*.

Shirley Temple was born on April 23, 1928, in Santa Monica, California. She began dance lessons when she was just three years old, and that early start paid off when she was cast in *Baby Burlesks*, a series of one-reel film shorts that parodied actual movies, with small children cast in the roles usually played by adults. At age five, she signed a contract with Fox Film Corporation. Her brief appearance in the feature film *Stand Up and Cheer*, released in 1934, started her on the road to stardom.

Seven more full-length movies followed in 1934, among them *Little Miss Marker*, which featured her first starring role, and *Bright Eyes*, which included what became one of her signature songs, "On the Good Ship Lollipop." That same year, a toy company produced and sold the Shirley Temple doll, which remains one of the most collectible dolls ever made. Coloring books, paper dolls, dresses, and recordings of songs from her movie roles were just a few of the other products inspired by America's favorite star.

Shirley Temple tap-danced with some of the film greats, including Buddy Ebsen and Jack Haley, but her most famous—and possibly favorite—dance partner was Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, with whom she starred in four movies. She called him "Uncle Billy," and he called her "Darlin'," and they remained friends for the rest of his life.

Mired in the economic tribulations of the Great Depression, moviegoers found joy and escape from everyday cares in the child star's bright smile, deep dimples, and irrepressible spirit. Her adorable looks were not her only asset; Shirley Temple was also a talented performer.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt himself praised her for helping to lift the spirits of a nation facing one of its greatest challenges. She was awarded the first-ever juvenile Oscar at the 1935 Academy Awards ceremony in recognition of her outstanding contribution to screen entertainment during the previous year. She went on to be the number one box-office draw for four years in a row. But by age 12, Shirley Temple's film career had reached its peak. She retired from movies at age 21.

In 1998, she was a Kennedy Center Honors recipient, and a year later the American Film Institute included her as one of the 50 greatest screen legends. The Screen Actors Guild presented her with their Life Achievement Award in 2006.

In 1950, Shirley Temple married Charles Black. During her years in Hollywood, she had involved herself in public service, and that commitment never wavered. During the 1960s, she served as president of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, raising funds and awareness. This was a very personal cause for her because her brother George suffered from the debilitating disease. In 1961, she co-founded the International Federation of Multiple Sclerosis Societies.

It was also during the 1960s that she became active in politics. A successful fund-raiser for various Republican candidates, Black herself ran for Congress in 1967. Though her bid was unsuccessful, her candidacy raised her profile in the party. President Richard Nixon appointed her a delegate to the United Nations in 1969, the beginning of her distinguished career in diplomacy. Although Black's appointment to the U.N. delegation was at first considered only a political reward for her support, her dedication and work ethic proved to doubters that she was a serious and knowledgeable delegate.

In 1972, Black, who had already proven her resilience, once more pioneered the way for other women when she became one of the first public figures to candidly acknowledge her breast cancer and mastectomy. Her courage in talking publicly is widely credited with helping to make the discussion about breast cancer, alternatives to radical mastectomies, and a woman's right to be part of the decision regarding her treatment acceptable in the public forum. In response, she received more than 50,000 cards and letters of appreciation and admiration.

Black was appointed U.S. ambassador to Ghana in 1974. She had experience working on African issues from her days at the U.N., but this was her first ambassadorial assignment, and career diplomats were skeptical. The Ghanaians accepted her wholeheartedly, and as Black proudly told President Gerald Ford later, she was made an honorary tribal chief.

President Ford appointed Black the U.S. Chief of Protocol in 1976. The protocol office plans the visits of foreign dignitaries to the U.S.; manages Blair House, the presidential guesthouse; and oversees all the ceremonial and official functions of the president, among numerous other duties. The first woman to hold the office, Black was an ideal choice, combining her experience in diplomacy with her natural charisma, charm, and organizational skills. Among her tasks was planning key elements of the inaugural celebrations for President-elect Jimmy Carter, Ford's successor.

President George H. W. Bush appointed Black U.S. ambassador to Czechoslovakia in 1989. Twenty-one years prior to her arrival in Prague as ambassador, Black had visited the city to organize Czechoslovakia's entry into the International Federation of Multiple Sclerosis Societies. During her stay, Warsaw Pact forces invaded the country to crush reform efforts, and she witnessed firsthand the violence that accompanied the invasion. It was fitting, then, that during her tenure as ambassador, the country overthrew its Communist government and began its peaceful division into two countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which became official after she had returned to the U.S.

Shirley Temple Black died on February 10, 2014.

